

HR and IT pros agree: Pallister's working vacations in Costa Rica not ideal

Premier plans to spend 6 to 8 weeks a year away, but party says he stays 'in regular contact'

By Sean Kavanagh, [CBC News](#) Posted: Dec 19, 2016 7:17 PM CT Last Updated: Dec 19, 2016 8:27 PM CT

Premier Brian Pallister's Costa Rican multi-week vacation may be longer than what regular workers get, but some say senior managers, such as premiers, fill their down-time with work.

However much time he spends working, security experts say Pallister's computer and mobile device need strong protection if he wants to conduct provincial business overseas.

Pallister told the Canadian Press he would spend six to eight weeks this year at his home in the Central American country. When he was opposition leader, CBC revealed that he was out of the province about 240 days either en route to or in Costa Rica.

- [Brian Pallister spends nearly 1 in 5 days of his time in Costa Rica, travel logs show](#)

A statement from the NDP opposition says Pallister's choice to be out of the province for up to eight weeks is an indication of his priorities.

"Families need to know that the premier is here at home, working for Manitobans," the NDP statement says.

The opposition doesn't have a problem with some time away from frozen Manitoba, but the length of Pallister's absence has drawn criticism.

"There is nothing wrong with taking a vacation, even in far-flung locations — but spending months at a time out of the country suggests that Manitoba families are not Pallister's top priorities," said the NDP.

Workaholics never shut off

With modern communications come the mobile office and the temptation to never shut down. A statement from Pallister's communications director Monday suggests his time in Costa Rica will be a mix of work and pleasure.

Olivia Baldwin-Valainis says with Manitoba's health minister in Ottawa today with federal provincial counterparts, Pallister is on top of what's going on.

"Today provides an example of these arrangements, while Manitoba's health and finance Ministers are in Ottawa fighting for a fair health funding partnership with the federal government. Premier Pallister has been in regular contact with Ministers and senior government staff throughout the day and has participated in dialogue with his counterparts from across the country on this important topic," Baldwin-Valainis wrote in an email.

"The Premier," Baldwin-Valainis says, "routinely works when he is away."

According to one human resource consultant, that's what happens to her clients when they try to go on vacation. Laptops and smartphones creep into leisure time.

Cissy Pau at Clear HR consulting says technology encroaches on vacation time.

"That ability to turn off isn't there and work and vacation and all that melds together. So, on the surface, eight weeks, wow, that's double what most people get. Right? You can hear a lot of people saying that — I only get four weeks, two weeks, or three weeks. But how much is actually vacating?" Pau said.

Pau says the meaning of vacation time has changed in just a few years.

"Prior to the age of the smartphone technology and being so accessible, I think when people actually went away, like in your case, went away for eight weeks, they actually were away for eight weeks. Now you can be away for eight weeks, but you are working every day."

Working vacations require high security

Pallister's communications director says while he's away, the premier checks in frequently.

"Measures are in place to ensure regular communication with the premier, including necessary briefings on urgent or emergent topics," wrote Olivia Baldwin-Valainis.

If that's the case and Pallister is working on a smartphone or laptop, it needs special protection.

"There is no question there is information in any government that someone out there can find some way to make use of for financial or political or other gain," said IT security expert Terry Ingoldsby.

Ingoldsby's company, Amenaza Technologies, created software to protect the avionics on the F35 fighter. He says someone at the Province of Manitoba should be ensuring Pallister's devices are protected while he's out of the office.

"If I knew that there was a top security person managing that laptop, checking it, making sure, yep, configuration hasn't changed, we've got software on it that locks it down — it can only be used for these purposes, then I would say the incremental risks whether it's in his house or Costa Rica are not much different," Ingoldsby said.

But the security risks increase even if Pallister surfs the web while overseas, or if it goes out of his sight for awhile, such as at an airport. Especially if the computer isn't being monitored by IT security specialists. Ingoldsby says proper protection will slow a computer down, so non-technical people tend to turn it off when they want to check the weather or basketball scores.

"The big risk comes when non-technical, non-security people start making decisions because, well, somebody wants to get to the internet and this thing is ghastly slow — if I just turn this off it goes faster," Ingoldsby said.

Tim McCreight with Above Security went even further, suggesting all executives with sensitive information on their devices have to be very cautious.

"Laptops should be encrypted with an application that has at least 256-bit AES encryption, and preferably whole-disk encryption is applied. The laptop should have some form of tracking mechanism installed, to identify where the laptop is geographically and to allow the organization's security department the ability

to track and/or disable the device should it be lost or stolen," McCreight wrote in an email.

Pallister's communication staff did not answer specifically if there are security measures in place to protect sensitive provincial information when he is in Costa Rica.

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